

DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER

APRIL 1942

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SIXPENCE

AUSTERITY?

ON THE 21st March, the 931st day of the war, in a West End food shop, two women stopped at the vegetable counter and asked the price of the French beans. The man said, "Seven and six a pound, Madam." One woman turned to the other and said, "It's incredible." The shopman said, "Yes it is, isn't it. Last week they were twenty-five shillings a pound."

And so with the new French beans and the spring of the third year of the war, a great call goes out from our various leaders, big and small, for a greater war effort. Austerity—urgency and all things nasty.

(Johnson put away the brandy—tell the girl in the spare room to get out—and lay out my hair shirt.)

The one thing that seems to have missed them is that it is difficult to be urgent unless you have some pretty solid idea to be urgent about. If you are urgent just for the sake of being urgent, it's like a broody hen sitting on a nest with china eggs in it. What's the good of being austere unless you have to. All this business of scourging and hair shirts, deliberately not eating, sleeping in a stone cell seems to be very teutonic. At least it is the kind of thing that the German leaders recommend for the German people.

There is quite certainly a lack of urgency in this country, but it comes from a people who have been mobilised for over two and a half years, and even now do not feel that they are really involved in the war.

The people of Britain are most likely the most grown-up people in the world. Everything that has happened to a people has happened to them and they know by experience what is right and what is wrong.

Everywhere people are talking. A soldier says, "The guns are put too close together and so when we are firing on a traverse, the crew of B gun have to leave their gun while A gun fires—they'd be blown off if they didn't." A woman in an aircraft factory says, "The owners of the factory take 7½ per cent on all wages earned. There are twenty thousand people in the factory. Say the average wage is five pounds a week, that means the employers rake in £7,500 a week profit on their employees."

Everywhere people are complaining about the way the war is run. This most likely happens in any country at war—because war is anyway so appallingly inefficient—but if you have a people who know and believe in what they are fighting for, they will get over the difficulties.

Continually since the war started the country has been fed with a series of slogans of one kind or another which are supposed to

interest the people in the war—to give them inspiration to fight and endure. Does anyone think that these mature English people are going to give everything (including their lives) for politicians' catch phrases? The answer is obviously—No. The British people can and have won more difficult battles than this one—and they are still the only people the Germans are afraid of. But the old ideas they fought for are worn out. Telling people to be austere and urgent, giving them slogans, is not going to make them fight. If they have something to fight for they will soon become urgent and make their own slogans—as the people of Russia have done. Obviously high-powered propaganda coming from every source of information is going to cover up the truth to a certain extent, but surely this is not the kind of thing we are working for.

It's not what we are supposed to be fighting for anyway. The greatest job of propaganda would be to put our own country in order. Conscript every man and woman in the country. Conscript all land, all raw materials. Conscript all means of production. Two weeks ago in Sheffield outside a smart hotel were 73 cars. Inside there was a very good dinner for 10s. 6d. Outside again were streams of factory workers, on the way home, carrying newspapers with a speech on austerity. Can anyone in their right minds think that when those factory workers go on the job in the morning—these people who have been doing an eleven-hour, six-day week for two years or more—can anyone believe that they will start their machines more determinedly next morning.

The amazing thing is that the people who have done so much with so little encouragement still stick at it. They dig up a million allotments when asked to, and they still see people around them who have all the food of all the kinds they want. They willingly wait patiently in queues—Service people stand willingly for a twelve-hour train journey—they accept the loss of husbands and brothers at sea, and they still see a mass of private cars around them. They see a thousand breaches of decency, a thousand costly mistakes, and still they keep on.

The apparent strategy of the war over the last year, as far as Britain itself is concerned, seems to be not unlike that of the first year of the war. The Germans evidently believe that a democracy will not move unless it has to. That if a country is held in a state of emergency for too long, it will fall to pieces internally. They were right about France, but they have been wrong about Britain. First the people were more mature and more stable than the French, and secondly Russia's fight gave them inspiration at the most dangerous moment. But even so, if the Germans apply the "leave

and let go stale" policy, we have obviously not got to sit and just live on our hump. A year's breather at home should be a time to recuperate and, once that is done, to take up an aggressive policy for everyone in the country. And an aggressive policy cannot be raised on worn-out words. The Germans know that the war depends on the people of the country as a whole. Especially on the ordinary people who do most of the foot slogging. The one thing the Germans have worked on in Britain, as far as the ordinary people are concerned, is that Britain is not seriously in the war. They have told America the same thing about us and with a certain amount of success up until December 7th. They told it to Australia, India, Burma, Russia, South America, South Africa, also with a certain amount of success.

The year's pause should have been used to build up internal unity with every means possible. We should have built up a feeling that everyone in the country is equally in the war; that everyone is sharing equally; that unearned privileges have been abolished; that no one is making a profit out of the country's troubles. This is obviously what the people want. This is the kind of feeling that will increase production, that will win battles. This is what will gain the confidence of our allies and the neutrals.

A certain amount has been done towards levelling up the country during the past year. One little thing like abolishing the basic petrol ration will gain more enthusiasm and greater support for the war than twenty speeches, no matter how sincere they are. At the moment if Britain started to put her house in order on a deliberate plan and with a good propaganda campaign for home and abroad, it might cut the length of the war by half. It would certainly give everyone confidence and something solid, something easily understood, to fight for.

NOTES OF THE MONTH

The End of an Argument

IT IS WITH some regret that we find it necessary to devote a great deal of valuable space in this issue to questions arising from the British Film Institute's production *Film and Reality*—a film which was reviewed at considerable length by Basil Wright in last month's issue. The major part of the documentary movement was from the beginning opposed to the production of this film, particularly those sequences dealing with the British movement, firstly, because the time seemed scarcely to be ripe, and secondly because such an attempt at contemporary historical record was felt to be a task better suited to a production committee than to an individual. Attempts were made by the Association of Realist Film Producers, the documentary movement's representative organisation, to influence the production, but without success. The sponsors of the film were not prepared to consult the documentary movement as a whole in this matter. Once the film had been completed, however, the Editorial Board of D.N.L. felt that this production must not be allowed to become the cause of internal quarrels between documentary personnel at a time when documentary energies are directed to more important objectives. We were aware that the danger existed that the film might be widely accepted as accurately representative of the work of the documentary movement. We were also aware that the release of the film, which incidentally contains significant omissions and inaccuracies, was being made the occasion of unfortunate personal recriminations. We nevertheless hoped that these parochial excitements would in time die down and that *Film and Reality* would one day be substituted by a record which would be more accurate and less subject to prejudice. Unfortunately, it has proved impossible for us to let the matter rest. We publish a letter from Mr. Lindgren of the British Film Institute which brings the issues to a point where they can no longer be ignored. It becomes clear that the controversy has taken a turn which fundamentally affects the purpose of documentary and the contribution which it can make to the war effort. The disagreement is no longer between personalities but between those who see the documentary movement primarily as a means of propaganda and those who would regard

it narrowly as an aesthetic form divorced from any specific purpose. At this time the documentary film makers cannot afford to play into the hands of those who would relegate them to the rôle of the "carriers-out" of propaganda ideas provided for them from outside the movement. The documentary film movement as it was created and developed under John Grierson was and still is directed to one purpose and to one purpose only—the formation of a body of skilled propagandists trained to express their propaganda ideas by means of film. We cannot allow to pass in silence any statement which suggests that documentary is nothing more than a tool lying ready to the hand of our amateur propagandists. It is as professional propagandists then, as well as film-makers, that we endorse Basil Wright's reply to Mr. Lindgren's letter. It represents our final word on *Film and Reality*. We do not propose to devote further space to the consideration of a film which has achieved so much unpleasantness.

Goodbye, Cassandra

A CORRESPONDENT WRITES: "One of the curious things about the debate in Parliament and the Press on the *Daily Mirror* was the fact that nearly everybody who discussed the paper so knowingly and patronisingly was obviously very seldom in the habit of reading it at all. They talked in terms of sensationalism and salaciousness, of lurid stories of rape and pictures of pretty nudes, which may have been true five years ago, but of which today *Jane* in her perpetual deshabille is the sole pale survivor. The fact is that over the past few years, and particularly since the beginning of the War, the *Daily Mirror* has changed out of recognition. It has adopted a plain, honest, straightforward policy and forceful critical line, and this has made it in a very special sense (which the wiseacre critics obviously do not appreciate) the Forces' paper. The Forces see printed in it the things they are saying themselves, and that they want to see said and the whole paper has become very much a part of their lives—*Popeye* and *Capt. Reilly-Ffoull*, *I Assure You*, and *Live Letterbox*, *W.M.* and, most of all, *Cassandra*. For seven years William Connor has been writing *Cassandra* in that simple straight Anglo-Saxon language of his. A touch of Beachcomber, a touch of Swift, the plain style of Defoe and through it all the sincerity of his Socialist faith and his honest anger at any humbugs, stupidity, cruelty or crookery. Isolationists, appeasers, Quislings, American exhibitionists, cheapsters, dividenders, the Free English, profiteers, bureaucrats and Fascists, in every country from Hitler down,—in fact all enemies of the common man, have all been named and held up to public obloquy in his column. *Cassandra* was one of the few pieces of journalism which named and attacked evil personalities as freely and fearlessly as the working man in the pub. And now *Cassandra* has to go. A fighter to the last, he has refused to compromise with the mealy-mouthed back-scratchers and place-seekers. His last article was a fine statement of what he stands for, what he has always fought for and still fights for. Here are his last words: "Mr. Morrison can have my pen—but not my conscience. Mr. Morrison can have my silence—but not my self-respect." *Cassandra* has gone, but we have by no means heard the last of William Connor.

Propaganda Policy

WE ARE indebted to the *Tatler* for the following war-winning sentiments: "The programme at the Regal also contained an, in some ways, excellent short M.O.I. film entitled *Builders*. This showed the enormous amount of work being done in the building line in parts of the country not habitually visited by the general public. The film strikes a note of commiseration for the men engaged in this work, and I am not quite sure about this. Bricklaying cannot be much fun at the best of times, and it doesn't seem to me to matter in what part of the country one does it. The lack of home comforts? But there are hundreds of thousands of men lacking home comforts at the moment, and the point is not a good one to make. This film also suggests that if after the war we continue pouring out money now devoted to the war upon improving the workers' conditions, this country will find itself in Paradise. It won't; it will find itself in bankruptcy. No, I take it that the business of the M.O.I. films is (a) not to argue, and (b) not to argue unsoundly."

INDIA—A SECOND CHANCE

IN April, 1942, the efforts of the Government of this country and the Congress Party of India to reach agreement on a series of proposals put forward by the Cabinet, broke down completely. India had held the headlines during the days which led up to this strange and disheartening event. The names Nehru, Jinnah and Azad were heard in buses and pubs. The people of this country for once took an interest in the vast sub-continent of Hindustan. They knew that Sir Stafford Cripps had become a modern Hercules, although sometimes when they really thought about it, they were not quite certain why he had become so famous, so much a symbol of hope. They knew too, that Nehru had been at Harrow and that it was very hot in Delhi. They were perhaps a little surprised that the only two famous figures whom they really connected with India should not be holding the centre of the stage—that the Viceroy and the Mahatma were both playing minor parts. But it was all going to be all right. Hercules was there.

The excitement was kept up. Hopes ran high. India was going to work with us, to fight with us and to win with us. Even the Japanese seemed to be helping by bombing Trincomalee and Cocos almost at the height of the negotiations. There was going to be a new brotherhood, new words of friendship on a clean slate and equal partnership in a new constitution.

Then suddenly everything changed. Within two days there was a complete collapse. Sir Stafford took his much delayed aerial departure and Nehru talked in a garden. Hercules had failed and, crying "No recriminations," was on his way home.

It is not the purpose of this article to enquire into the reasons for the failure of yet another mission, although such an enquiry would be interesting even if it was also disheartening. One might argue that statesmen are elected and paid to do a job for which years of training and experience have fitted them, and that if they continually fail to do their jobs, they are no more to be condoned with than a plumber who connects the water pipes to the gas jets. In fact, judging by the streams of cold water which are continually being poured upon the British people, from sources which should have produced warming flames, it would be a good thing to consider occasionally exactly what sort of plumbers we have got.

But it is more to our purpose at the moment to enquire into and consider the truly appalling problem confronting our propaganda services in so far as India is concerned.

Germany and Japan have not stopped but have redoubled their propaganda efforts. Sometimes India is promised equal partnership, and sometimes she is offered her share of a new Asiatic order. She is also frequently offered the sun, moon and the stars, together with easy recipes for obtaining these alluring objects. These offers do not fall upon deaf ears. The people who listen to them no doubt do so all the more eagerly because of their recent intense disappointment. They do not necessarily believe them but they would like to believe them and this alone will prepare the ground. It is no good us sitting back and saying that it is India's own fault and it would not be any good doing that whether it were true or not.

Like it or not, we must be certain of one thing in the coming weeks, and that is that at least India will not hinder our efforts to fight the Japanese. There must be no repetition of Burma where thousands of Burmese fought against us, preferring Japanese to British domination.

And how are we to ensure that this shall not happen? What message have we got to give to India? Ever since the war started the efforts of many people have been directed to persuading India that she should come into the war. Their efforts have been in vain.

War propaganda committees set up in India, the press, the radio, poster and film have done their damndest and failed: India remained unmoved. Propaganda breaks down as it will always break down if it has nothing of the heart to offer.

If the problem confronting propaganda was difficult then, consider what it is now. There was always the faint hope in the Indian mind that one day Britain would recognise India's right to independence: ignoring the war was one way of constantly reminding us of that hope, and this did form some sort of a bridge across which a few of our propaganda messages could travel. Now even that link has gone.

We were told during the negotiations in Delhi that the eyes of Egypt were on India, and this was doubtless true of Ceylon, the African Colonies and the West Indies. To the whole world it looked like a test case, a test of our good intentions, of our success or failure in giving self-government to the peoples under our flag. To the peoples of our colonies it must have looked like the beginning of a new era.

The reaction everywhere must have been profound. We had failed; and whichever side was to blame it did not make any difference. There would be plenty of voices ready to say

that we had never meant to succeed and plenty of people ready to listen. And perhaps it is better so. Who would not rather be thought wicked than stupid?

This is a depressing picture. It establishes a fact that cannot be repeated too often and that is that long term propaganda must always have something to say, must carry a message of hope, of promises that can be fulfilled, but it also suggests that we cannot now carry out any effectual propaganda in India and even perhaps in many other places.

But surely we have something to say. Our cupboard cannot be quite as bare of hope as one would imagine from the way in which we keep the door so discreetly shut. This is not only a war of defence, of defending ourselves and our possessions and our many, dusty prejudices. Surely it is a war of attack, of a military and a mental assault. Now is the time when the mind must move forward as well as the sword.

Already there are signs that perhaps all is not lost. In the news reports, in people's minds, is hope that something may yet be done. After the first shock of disappointment, people have rallied. We have stated that our offer still stands. Indian politicians are said to be having further discussions among themselves. Perhaps something will be agreed upon yet.

Now is the time for propaganda to get to work. Ever since the negotiations started it has at last had something to say and, now that they are over, its job is not finished. It can build on the goodwill left behind. Britain has shown a willingness to move forward and even if the step was faltering at least we hope the goodwill was there. Let the propaganda services make the most of their opportunity now, for they can be certain that their opponents are making the most of theirs. By newspaper, radio and film India must be constantly assured that the offer still stands and that we are prepared to re-discuss that offer with them.

There is no need to wait for something new to be said, there is enough material ready, waiting to be used. And it is good material because, although there is not much of it, it is at least honest. Against the airy castles being built for India by Rome, Berlin and Tokio we can speak in a loud voice to tell India that at least we are looking forward and that we will go on looking forward. Our voice could be stronger than the voices of our enemies because we could offer India and the colonies something better than our enemies can. We could offer them a change of heart.

MORE SCHOOL FILMS

OLIVER BELL, Director of the British Film Institute, discusses the future of our visual education sources.

POLITICALLY the Board of Education has been the Cinderella of Government Departments. The Presidency, which should rank as a post of the highest honour and distinction, has been regarded all too often only as a stepping-stone to further advancement. The result has been a continual change of direction at the top, a discontinuous policy and an unwillingness to devote time and money to research. Add to this the fact that most members of Finance Committees of Local Government bodies retard expenditure on education as wanton extravagance and the resulting picture is not something of which to boast.

The present war has released us from many inhibitions, as the continual talk of reconstruction and post-war planning bear witness. In the world of education too, the keen people are considering this sorry scheme of things and talking of how they would remould it nearer to their hearts' desire. Consideration is being given not only to the fundamentals of education and its ultimate purpose but also to the new teaching methods which people would like to see introduced.

In discussing these new methods great emphasis has been placed on visual education. Ever since the Greek philosophers drew their geometrical diagrams in the sand, visual education has had a place in the teaching system but until recently it never got farther than the blackboard or in extreme cases the magic lantern. The invention of the comparatively cool, high-light-output electric lamp has widened the range of this form of teachers' aid enormously. It has made practicable the episcopes which depend on reflected light and enables pictures, drawings or printed matter to be thrown on the screen. It has also rendered possible the full development of the sub-standard cine-projector, both sound and silent.

The teaching film has only come into its own, in fact, during the last decade and it is still less since, with the foundation of the British Film Institute, it was possible to focus opinion on to the principles which underlie instruction by film and suggest ways and means of overcoming the difficulties that emerged with the development of this new form of education. How useful an instrument the film had become even before the autumn of 1939 can be gauged by the fact that relatively less ground has been lost in this educational field than in any other. That is not to say, however, that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

The amount of apparatus in the schools of the United Kingdom (excluding Northern Ireland where there is none) is trifling com-

pared with the U.S.A. or the Axis countries. There are fewer than 3,000 16-mm. projectors in operation, and in the schools of England only about 2,000, of which 1,350 are silent, and 450 sound machines. This is not a great number considering that there are over 30,000 schools. This paucity is one of the difficult factors in the situation. With such a limited market it is not really a commercial proposition to make special teaching films. The supply to the schools has therefore in large degree been derived from advertising or semi-advertising sources. Where the films were specially designed for schools, notably in the now defunct Kodak Library or the G.B. and E.G.S. libraries, they were mainly an adjunct to the sale of equipment against the profits from which their renting losses were offset. This situation reacted unfavourably on the teaching world who could not see why they should spend precious money when the supply was so small.

The breaking of this vicious circle lies at the root of all post-war plans. Its solution is simply a matter of capital. Can the Local Education Authorities and the Board of Education, that is to say, the ratepayers and the taxpayers, both of whom contribute to local education, in the midst of all their other problems of rebuilding schools, reconditioning schools, installing electricity, proper sanitation and the rest, be persuaded to find say £1,500,000, spread over ten years, for this purpose? All of us who are interested in films whether we be administrators, film makers, or teachers hope that the answer will be Yes! It is not a great deal to ask if you believe, as we believe, that whatever other economies in national expenditure are effected after the war, that on education with all it implies as a long term national policy shall be maintained and expanded. Cruel though it may sound I would even be prepared to economise on old-age and other pensions in order to give the people of the future a better chance.

Supposing we carry the day for education, in terms of the visual aspect of the subject, what then? As I see it we must be prepared for a little more centralisation. The present system of complete decentralisation has much to commend it in that it gives the greatest scope to individual initiative. But it also has the disadvantages of small scale operations, the inertia of getting a large number of autonomous bodies on the move, in overlapping and waste of effort. Nowhere is the need for centralisation more evident than in dealing with relatively expensive apparatus like film projectors and relatively expensive supplies like teaching films, the

capital cost of which is high. I see, therefore a system developing based on regional organisation much as the M.O.I. and other Government Departments are working to-day. I advocate the establishment of regional film libraries and film groups whose work would be co-ordinated by a central institute and library.

The experience of the Scottish Regional Film Library which was set up three years ago, thanks to a £5,000 grant from the Carnegie Trustees, and is now sending out 4,000 reels a month on a basis of hire, leads one to believe that the scheme is feasible. The creation of such regional libraries does not preclude the existence of local film libraries such as exist in several of the richer areas in Scotland to-day. But it is only the richer areas which can maintain their own libraries, and so the regional affair would supplement their requirements and provide a full service to those Authorities which had no library of their own. Similarly the central library would supplement the needs of the regional libraries in the same way as, for books, the National Central Library supplements the activities of local or county libraries.

These regional organisations would also provide an opportunity for pooled buying of apparatus, for a common maintenance service and so forth.

So far this is simply an administrative solution of a general problem. What is far more important to my mind is the Teachers' Film Group. Past experience in this country and in Scotland, where the Scottish Educational Film Association is a most flourishing concern, shows their value in maintaining interest in the subject; for exchanging ideas, pre-viewing films, organising refresher courses on manipulation and teaching method, and, last but by no means least, for research and making known teachers' wants. This form of organisation should be encouraged and developed. And I conceive it to be a function of the British Film Institute, as an unofficial body in a central position, to undertake this development by enlarging and strengthening its educational side so as to make it a separate department of its work.

Thus I suggest the work and functions of a central institute might be:

- (a) To be a clearing house for the data obtained by the local bodies regarding technical and pedagogic problems.
- (b) To carry out research regarding such problems.
- (c) To act as an information bureau on all relevant matters.
- (d) To publish a consolidated catalogue evaluating all existing films and other projection material.
- (e) To act as an advisory body regarding the production of new films, etc.
- (f) To organise exhibitions, conferences, and so forth and to assist local bodies in carrying out similar activities.

It is through the activities of existing film groups focused in this manner that we have already worked out the broad aspects of

teaching technique with various types of apparatus and are beginning to appreciate the relative values of the sound and the silent film for different age-groups and for different types of instruction, always bearing in mind that the film does not supersede the teacher. It provides him with a convenient instrument for increasing his own powers of instruction and exposition.

Recently the Scottish Educational Film Association published a report at 1s. on the General Principles governing the Production of Educational Films. I commend it to the notice of all film-makers interested in the development of the film for teaching purposes. It is obviously not the last word on the subject but it serves to show where the mind of the teaching world is moving. It is interesting to note the number of subjects in which film can play a part. The Report enumerates English, History, Civics, Geography, Languages, Science, Biology, Botany, Physical Education and Hygiene. It does not state the relative importance of each of these subjects in the curriculum. It seems safe to assume, however (just as the Documentary movement has assumed since its inception),

that the teaching of Civics will play an ever more important part in the general objects of education. It is the subject which has perhaps been most lacking from our curriculum in the past. Its need is shown by the demand for lectures in the Forces on current political problems; by the establishment of an Army Bureau of Current Affairs with regular lectures in training time; by the reception which has been accorded by ordinary adults to the pre-war and more recent M.O.I. films of a "documentary" character.

The teachers then have already made some of their wants known but in the days after the war there must be a more organised system whereby the teacher, the film-maker and the general public are brought into contact to learn each other's point of view and to provide a stimulus to new developments. In the central institution which I advocate, I see the solution. It is here that the makers of documentary films can keep in touch with the currents of opinion in the teaching world. It is here that the teaching world can be advised of the opinions of those with a more general outlook and it is here that a continuing production policy can be evolved.

means the bulk of our population—are to have the incalculable benefit of consistent war indoctrination from the screen, then the giant resources available to provide it had better be utilised—quickly. Now is no time for committees to be complacently pondering whether morale films are to be distributed free or on a rental basis, whether the Government is to pay for prints or the industry is to assume that cost. Now is no time for illusions about "Business as usual" in this line. Either the motion picture industry—meaning theatre operators quite as well as producers—must acknowledge and assume a national service at some probable financial sacrifice or it must stand in the futile position of letting "I dare not" wait upon "I will". A clamouring public, we might add, could have a lot to do with calling the tune.

Of course, when we speak of morale films we have particular reference to "shorts"—one and two reel documentaries, information and inspirational films—which experience has proved are most effective in stimulating a thoughtful response. We do not mean fiction features, which are, in general, another breed of cat, but which do have, of course, considerable influence on the public's emotional whims.

And it just so happens that the industry has already turned out on its own account—and released through its own competitive channels for the usual considerations—a number of commendable "short subjects" which might serve as worthy specimens of morale films. There are the two initial releases in United Artists' World-in-Action Series—the films called *Churchill's Island* and *Battle for Oil*, made by Stuart Legg for the National Film Board of Canada—and as fine examples of intelligent persuasion and dramatic punch as you will see. There was that very good Metro two-reeler, *Main Street on the March*, which won an Academy "Oscar", and another pat one, *Don't Talk*, not yet released, which graphically illustrates the danger of letting vital information slip. There have been several highly pertinent topics explored by the March of Time within the past year, among which particular attention, for purposes of reference, should be called to *When Air Raids Strike*. And Twentieth Century-Fox and the Warners, in a purely inspirational vein, have made some interesting pictures of our various armed services in action.

Unquestionably, our motion picture industry is thoroughly competent to produce and distribute morale films of variety and excellence. But it must have a co-operative organisation and supervision as to policy before it can undertake a programme of, say, fifty-two films a year. And, regarding that matter of policy, it is obvious that the time has now come when the public stands in need of some enlightenment along broad, strategic lines. More than a simple illustration of an assembly line for bombers or tanks, our fact films must next show the people the ways in which these instruments are used, the complicated problems of transporting them to the fronts where they are in demand, the vital necessity for getting them there in the shortest possible time. The man in the street is beginning to see this war on a geo-political map. That is a fact which film producers should not henceforth overlook.

And so, in the hope and confidence which we have steadfastly held all along, this column is restively waiting for a programme to be laid out. Maybe a jolt is needed to throw the machinery into gear. But sooner or later it will happen. We'd hate to think otherwise.

U.S.A. FILM NEEDS

By BOSLEY CROWTHER

Reprinted by courtesy of the *New York Times*

TWO MONTHS ago this column gave voice to some hopeful remarks about the mobilisation of movies as a factor toward creating war morale. One month ago we yammered that no apparent progress had been made. And now, for a third time, we are asking—with a rumble of impatience creeping in—why our great motion picture industry has not been more rapidly enrolled to help get across to the public the facts and deep significance of this war.

Granted that motion pictures are not the only medium of communication not yet geared. Granted, as Edward L. Bernays, the eminent publicist, observed in a recent *Saturday Review*, that we still "are not using the modern weapons of total psychological warfare to fight a modern total war". And granted, as Mr. Bernays further put it, that "a variety of propaganda agencies is at work, only loosely tied together, each calling vague signals to the other—when there should be the grand strategy and the grand approach". There still is no moral reason which historians will later respect why a medium as vast and potential as motion pictures should not have been coupled by now to a programme of national persuasion in this time of our country's direst need.

When we speak of persuasion we do not remotely suggest that films should be used as a bludgeon to beat dogmas into the people's heads. We mean that they should be fashioned according to a thoughtful and orderly plan to convey to the public information of both a general and specific nature—information which would not only help the people to prepare and adapt themselves to wartime circumstances, but would give them a vital awareness of the scope of this grave thing we are up against. Such clear and sober comprehension is essential to psychological stability in a democracy.

Yet it is vaguely possible that our Government has been reluctant to initiate a carefully patterned programme of motion pictures designed to coalesce morale because it might fear that such a programme would smack of a totalitarian wile. At least that is a generous explanation for the failure of Lowell Mellett, the Government's present film co-ordinator, to authorise any more than a few Government agency films and certainly nothing that resembles a comprehensive programme. (The fact that the British Ministry of Information has been using films intensively for two years is an incidental rebuttal.) And so it seems distressingly obvious, with more than three months gone by, that if this country is to have a steady, intelligent flow of morale films, then it is up to the established industry to get together and turn them out. Anyhow, it should start the ball rolling against the time when the Government might decide to supervise.

To the manifest credit of the producers, it must be said that they are ready to do their share. The War Activities Committee of the "Hays office," with Francis Harmon at its head, has been giving Mr. Mellett and the Government an abundance of invaluable aid not only in releasing such pictures as the Government agencies (and the industry itself) have already turned out, but in making theatres and artists available for bond sales, book collections and such. And Mr. Harmon and his aides have been exploring, with caution and due regard for trade quagmires, the chances for a practical programme of morale films, with the industry doing the job.

But the clocks are inexorably ticking, the leaves are falling from the calendar one by one, and the Nazis and the Japs are not waiting for the industry—or any one—to form a plan. If the millions of movie-goers in this country—and that

NEW DOCUMENTARY FILMS

Teeth of Steel. Technique Films for British Council. Director: Ronald H. Riley. Producer: James Carr. Cameraman: Geoffrey Unsworth. Script: Max Munden. 10 minutes.

Subject: There is no story as such, the film consisting of a series of shots showing modern excavators at work. Giant power-driven shovels are seen cutting canals, draining swamps, carving out railroads, extracting ore from the earth.

Treatment: Not for long have we seen a film so infatuated with the worship of the machine for itself. The director was apparently so overcome with the monstrous size and power of his excavators that he concluded they worked themselves without any human agency.

Apart from a symbolic opening close-up of a labourer, there are no people in the film at all. This, though hard to believe, is literally true. There is only a monotonous repetition of different types of machines in long-shot, mid-shot and close-up. The skill of the men who operate these giants finds no place whatever.

The film is shot throughout in Technicolor. Some of the colour is pleasant, particularly a sequence in an iron foundry (even this is shot without a human being in sight). There is also a weighty musical score that attempts valiantly to infuse some excitement into the footage.

It is difficult to understand how a subject that obviously possesses a fine dramatic quality could have been approached in such a dull and inhuman manner.

Propaganda: It is hardly likely that in this day and age there is much propaganda value in showing a succession of big machines, even in glorious Technicolor. *Teeth of Steel* is such a throw-back to the predocumentary era that one feels slightly mystified as to why it was made at all. It is rather like an elegant and more costly item from a very old issue of the *Ideal Cine-Magazine*, decked out with all modern accessories.

If the last ten years has not taught us that the machine means little without the people who make it and the people who work it, with all the skill, craftsmanship and work tradition that goes into both, then we seem to have been wasting our time.

A Way to Plough. Verity Films. Production: James Carr and Sidney Box. Direction and Camera: Clifford Hornby. Technical Adviser: S. J. Wright. Editing: John Durst. Commentation: Fred Grisewood. 15 minutes.

Subject: A group of Land Girls are taught the correct method of ploughing a field. It is a scientific job and, for the beginner, full of pitfalls. The girls are taught by one of their colleagues, already proficient, and the right and wrong ways of setting about it are clearly shown.

Treatment: As in all the Ministry of Agriculture films, the treatment is extremely simple and lucid. Here, the actual shots of the tractor as it ploughs the field are supplemented by diagrams which demonstrate very effectively the course to be pursued. Photography and commentary are well up to standard, and the girls, both the green-horns and the expert, are pleasant people who really look as if they are trying to learn the job.

Instructional Value: As an aid to training, excellent. On subjects such as this a film is worth far more than its weight in text-books.

March of Time No. 10. Seventh Year. *The Argentine Question.* 20 minutes.

Subject: The film endeavours to survey the economic resources, social structure and political course of the important South American Republic. Economically she is not self-supporting, lacking coal, iron and other vital minerals. Because of this she is dependent on the U.S.A. for armaments. The country has always lived on her exports, particularly beef and grain, and although the war has cut off most of this trade, Argentina feels more bound to Europe than the U.S.A.

Popular feeling is overwhelmingly anti-Nazi. Large scale Fifth Column Axis-inspired activity has been discovered, but the Government in a desperate desire to remain neutral refuses to break relations with the Axis Powers.

Treatment: There is a complete lack of unity between the visuals and the commentary. It looks as if a cameraman was given a roving commission to shoot everything he could find without working to any plan or prepared script. The commentary goes on and on, and half the time the visuals bear no conceivable relation to what is being said. Neither is there any attempt at a deep social analysis of the country. For instance, there is a naive remark to the effect that Argentina is one of the few South American nations that has a large middle-class public—"the kind of men and women . . . who in every country are the backbone of democracy."

Propaganda Value: Despite its faults, the film will have a certain informative interest for audiences unfamiliar with Argentina as anything but a country vaguely situated somewhere in South America. The sequences of her modern cities, her factories, wharves and docks build up a strong impression of a busy, modern industrialised country and it is easy to understand the importance of Argentina as a potential jumping-off ground for an Axis offensive designed firstly to gain complete control of the South American continent, and secondly, as a basis for intimidation of the U.S.A.

Diary of a Polish Airman. Production: Concanen Films in collaboration with the Polish Ministry of Information and the Polish Air Force. M.O.I. 5 minutes.

Subject: The adventures of a Polish airman, who escaped from Poland and fought in France, came to Britain and was finally killed in an air battle.

Treatment: The story of the film is told by the dead airman's diary as his brother officers turn over its pages. This is an effective way of doing it and the film itself is quite well and simply made and makes quite an impression of sincerity. It contains a good deal of library material, including some so far unpublished shots of Warsaw, and most of the rest is nicely shot in sympathetic close-up.

Propaganda Value: The film should help by giving a sympathetic presentation of the Polish Government's war effort and it succeeds in making their hate of Hitler very real. What is, however, not quite so happy is the picture which many will find a little difficult to appreciate of a type of person who carries on a vendetta sort of fight from one country to another. The fight of Poland itself is another and more thrilling story, but we can hardly expect a film about that just yet.

Builders. Production: Crown Film Unit. Direction: Pat Jackson. Camera: Pennington-Richards. Editor: Francis Cockburn. Commentary: John Hilton. M.O.I. 5 minutes.

Subject: The place of builders in the war effort. **Treatment:** The camera and commentator go down to a war factory in process of erection and interview three typical workers there: a bricklayer, a navvy and a crane-driver. They are extremely lively lads, especially Charlie, the bricklayer, though George, the navvy, with his perpetual moan runs him pretty close. They feel that laying bricks and so on puts them a bit outside the war effort, but the commentator proves to them that their job is very important. They finish by a bit of optimistically vague discussion on the possible future of England after the war, but the quality of the film stands or falls by the personality of Charlie and he is extremely good. It is a real treat to hear a sound-track of working-men talking with a feeling of independence.

Propaganda Value: The film should be of great help as a pat on the back and bit of general encouragement to anybody doing any sort of building job and the general public will get a kick out of the vitality of the whole concern. There is just one thing wrong; the men in question, though very lively, do give the impression of being "tame" in the same sense that conservative party candidates used to exhibit "tame" working-men on their platforms. Hard as it tries, the film does give the impression that anything the future holds for these men and their mates is

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(Cert. U)

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Commentated by Emmett

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going to be provided for them from above. Their place and function is to be lively, do their job and support their leaders. This is certainly a possible future for this country, but it is by no means a pleasant one and certainly not one we are fighting Hitler for. The film about the future of the country should tell us not what the working-man would like to have given him, but what he feels he wants badly enough to go and get for himself.

✓ **The Countrywomen.** Production: Seven League Productions. Direction: John Page. Associate Producer: Paul Rotha. M.O.I. 15 minutes. Subject: This film is a fireside chat about country life and the activities of the Women's Institute, past and present, for the benefit of a woman evacuated from the town. The discourse is illustrated by appropriate visual accompaniment. The evacuee is invited to a W.I. meeting at which matters of local and national importance are discussed.

Treatment: In spite of an attempt to give a natural and informal setting to this film, the approach to the subject is quite impersonal. The evacuee seems to have very little connection with the film; she is merely the audience listening to the countrywoman's talk on the work of the Institute, and occasionally she asks questions. The visual aspect of the film, often very beautifully photographed, illustrates the commentary, but in itself is rather meaningless and disjointed. We are told there is a communal allotment in the village; all we see are several different types of women apparently doing some gardening. Miscellaneous shots of a village shop, a bus, a telephone box, evacuee children having tea and so on, are held together by the slender threads of the conversation between the two women. We see no more of the life of the women in the village than would be observed by a casual visitor: it is not only rather superficial but is inclined to be patronising, and disappointing to one who has known and lived among country people.

Propaganda value: As an instructional film on the activities of Women's Institutes it is reasonably adequate; but if it had given the town-dweller a real understanding of country people, their difficulties and the social importance of their community life, it would have contributed to that finer type of propaganda which presents the democratic institutions of this country from the point of view of human values.

✓ **For Children Only.** M.O.I. for Ministry of Food. Production: Strand Film Co. Producer: Alexander Shaw. Direction: John Eldridge. Camera: Charles Marlborough. Non-theatrical. 9 minutes.

Subject: This film introduces mothers to a scheme for providing children with fruit juices and cod-liver oil and shows them how these things can be obtained.

Treatment: It points out that in wartime when the usual foodstuffs are restricted children must be given something to make up for the deficiency. It is for this reason that the Government has allowed valuable shipping space to be taken up in bringing cod-liver oil from Iceland and fruit juices from America. Mothers are told that their children must have one or other of these concentrated foods to get the right amount of vita-

mins. The film goes on to say that it is a mother's duty to take advantage of this new scheme not only because of the trouble that has been taken to make it possible but to assure the good health of her children. Films made for the sole purpose of giving information such as this are always in danger of becoming boring. But *For Children Only* somehow manages to avoid this by introducing a central character—a mother, who makes use of the Government's offer, and thus gives the film a slight personal interest.

Propaganda value: This film is a good example of how films could be used for making important announcements. It gives the facts in a clear and interesting form and would make an excellent starting off point for a lecture or discussion on the subject. Should not such a film as this be available also for theatrical distribution?

✓ **Filling the Gap.** Production: Realist Film Unit. Cartoon: Halas-Batchelor. Music: Ernst Meyer. 5 minutes.

Subject: An appeal for us all to grow our own vegetables, in order to leave farming land free for crops.

Treatment: Animated diagram and cartoon meet in this film on common ground. The result is pleasing, for the treatment is simple and imaginative. By adopting the cartoon's flexibility and some hint of its inconsequent gaiety in their diagram sequences, and by retaining something of the diagram's essential simplicity in their pure cartoon sequences, the makers have achieved a lively and entertaining film. In details, however, it falls below the high standard it sets itself. One of the early sequences lacks clarity: the play with the three categories of food leaves the audience in doubt. And there is an unpleasant change of style at the end in the drawing of a gathering of vegetables: it smacks of advertisements for Heinz 57 varieties. One discounts the roughness of the purely mechanical work—the excessive outline wobble, the evidence of celluloid buckle, the unsteady camerawork—as being due to the limitations of time and cost.

It is, perhaps, inevitable to compare any cartoon form with Disney's work, which is neither fair to Disney nor to the cartoonist; for time and cost play a decisive part in the execution of cartoon ideas. But there is one factor common to the making of all cartoons, and that is the film sense behind the execution. This, and not necessarily his million pound equipment and his hundreds of personnel, gives Disney his place in cartoon. His films, in the main, are gems of imaginative construction. It is just this film sense which *Filling the Gap* lacks to some extent. There are awkward transitions and odd uses of screen space. However, altogether it is an enterprising film, to which Ernst Meyer's abstract music contributes an adequate, if uninspired sound track in company with the easy, straightforward commentary.

Propaganda value: A film such as this will probably command more attention in the cinema than most. Its simple message, therefore, stands a good chance of going home. It is unfortunate that the sponsors have seen fit to end the film with an ugly title describing the urgency of the problem (surely a tacit admission that they don't believe in the propaganda value of the film). Its only effect is to make what one has just seen appear quite trivial.

✓ **Via Imperial.** Production: Strand Films. Direction: Desmond Dickenson.

Story: The growth of cables and wireless. The British Empire's need for rapid communication. Coming up to date with war communications, official and personal.

Treatment: Starting off with the development of communications, *via Imperial* works up through reconstructed sequences—such as the first murderer to be arrested by a telegraph message beating the train he was on. The difficulties of laying and maintaining the first Atlantic cable. Queen Victoria exchanging telegrams with President of the United States. Marconi and the first wireless signal across the Atlantic. Modern cables, wireless telegraphy and news picture transmission. There is the whole sequence from the G.B. news-reel of Scott and Black's arrival in Australia. Each frame of film was enlarged and telegraphed to England and the film was in the cinemas the next day.

Propaganda: Good straight-forward film. Very good for schools.

PLUS CA CHANGE

D.N.L. readers may be interested in the following extracts from a periodical of the last war (title unknown), pages of which members of the Editorial Board recently found wrapped round three pennyworth of peanuts.

A Rapid Conversion

It would be difficult to find a more striking instance of the power of personality and practical work than in the case of the Minister of Information. When Lord Beaverbrook was appointed there was quite an outcry in the Press and the critics in the House of Commons were loud voiced. To-day, on all sides there is nothing but praise for the excellent results of his efforts. Even the enemy has been moved to admiration.

Keen Interest

Movies are attended by some risks at Jerusalem, where they have been instituted since our occupation of the Holy City. It seems that the natives are quite unable to comprehend that the characters are not present in the flesh. Not only do they cheer the hero and heroine, and groan and growl at the villain, but they even pelt him with stones, sticks and offal, damaging the screen and not infrequently injuring the stage hands.

The New Taxi Manners

A friend of mine living in Roehampton could not get a taxi to bring her to the Ritz to lunch the other day. In despair she made a sign to a lucky woman who was driving past in one and begged for a lift, and she proved a friend in need, and soon they took up another wayfarer. I am told that it is becoming quite the commonest occurrence for perfect strangers to share taxis nowadays.

Questions in Parliament

Talking of boxing one cannot help wondering what Lord Lonsdale thinks of the precious Wilde v. Conn match, which has taken a soldier and an artificial limb-maker away from their work to share an enormous purse. Most sportsmen seem to think the whole thing was ill-advised, and there are rumours that questions on the affair will be raised when Parliament next meets.

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PROPAGANDA OR AESTHETICS?

We publish below a letter from ERNEST LINDGREN, curator of the National Film Library (British Film Institute), on the subject of Basil Wright's review of *Film and Reality* which appeared in D.N.C. for March. Lindgren's letter is followed by a reply from Wright, and the matter is also referred to in "Notes of the Month."

THE EDITOR,
Documentary News Letter,
34 Soho Square, W.1.

SIR,

In the generous review which you gave to *Film and Reality*, Basil Wright makes a number of criticisms to which I have no intention of replying in detail. Cavalcanti is fully capable of defending his own work, if he feels any defence is necessary. If, as Wright concedes, the film is stimulating, then from our point of view it is a success. If opinion differs as to its composition and conclusions, this is simply because we are dealing with a very live subject and not with some academic corpse.

I may perhaps be permitted to comment on two points of fact. Firstly, Wright complains that in dealing with British documentary Cavalcanti has "almost ignored the dynamic use of sound"; in fact, out of a total of six extracts from British documentaries, three are selected to illustrate exactly this, as the commentary in each case makes clear. Secondly, we are told: "there is one other omission, and that is the analytic film dealing with mechanical or scientific processes"; in fact, this *genre* is represented by examples from the work of Charles Urban, Bruce-Woolfe, Mary Field and Percy Smith, Dr. R. G. Cañti, Dr. Russell Reynolds and Jean Painlevé—six examples in all. Extracts from *Aero-Engine*, *Transfer of Power*, and the like were omitted because their success depends largely on a clever use of animated diagrams, and we did not regard diagrams as falling within our already vast province.

Really, however, what I wish to comment on are the larger issues raised in Wright's article, and especially those which go deep down into the future of the documentary movement. It is plain that Wright's main quarrel with Cavalcanti arises from the latter's alleged underestimation of the sociological importance of modern (especially British) documentary, and overestimation of film technique, which is belittlingly called "mere aesthetics". Again and again in his review Wright reveals this contempt for technique which, under Grierson's influence, has permeated all the critical writing of the British school in recent years.

To me it seems that this view is thoroughly pernicious and rests on an entirely false distinction. It is a widespread heresy, not confined to the film world, that what one says and how one says it, are two different things. Professor Joad in a recent Brains' Trust session argued that Shakespeare's line, "Come away, come away, death," etc., contained exactly the same thought as "My girl has jilted me and I want to die", although the second was commonplace and the first so lovely that it sent shivers down his spine. To me this is nonsense. Art is the communication of experience. These two quotations give expression to entirely different levels of experience, and so say entirely different things. When Joad equates them, he merely reduces them both to the lowest common denominator. But once you do that to Shakespeare's lines, you have

destroyed, not merely their form, but their content. In any work of art, the content lies in the form. This appears to me the most elementary axiom of art criticism.

It is the failure to appreciate this axiom which leads Wright to make such confused and even self-contradictory statements as (1) "The various early experiments in sound were important not merely from the aesthetic point of view, but because they were designed to strengthen and classify the social angle." (2) British documentary films tended to "sacrifice purely aesthetic considerations to the need for pungent comment and the imaginative presentation of facts and problems".

The realist film, says Wright in his programme for the future, must "devote itself to the urgencies of the moment with the same dynamic emphasis which marked the revolutionary period of the Soviet film." But were the highest achievements of the Soviet cinema attained by labelling technique as "mere aesthetics" and despising it? On the contrary, as we all know, they devoted the greatest attention to purely technical experiments and the working out of a sound critical theory, laying the foundations for all subsequent film criticism. Eisenstein's preoccupation with "mere aesthetics" is far greater than Cavalcanti's has ever been. Pudovkin similarly.

There is a theory that technique can be left to look after itself if only one is sincere and has something really vital to say. I cannot believe that such a fine craftsman as Wright is not aware how nonsensical this is. In the National Film Library Loan Section we have two films, both made in Germany at the same time on the same theme: *Kameradschaft* and *War is Hell*. Was Pabst really sincere? Recent rumour tends to deny it. But to-day *Kameradschaft* is still as vital an utterance as ever, while *War is Hell* has already become a museum curiosity. To-day it is still a real joy to watch *Night Mail*, with its superb cutting and imaginative uses of sound, while many other documentaries it would be unkind to name, with messages no less sincere or important, are mercifully consigned to limbo.

I hope by the way that no one will construe me to be championing mere technical virtuosity, which simply represents the opposite extreme of this same heresy that one can in practice separate thought and expression, form and content.

I have the greatest sympathy with the sociological aims of the British documentary movement. When Wright says, "I believe absolutely that the revolutionary technique is the only technique," he sounds a resounding bugle call for the future. I devoutly hope that British documentary may keep its ideals untarnished, for it is one weapon we possess against the lowering threat of coming disillusion. But if that weapon is not to fail in our hand, those on whose work it depends must get rid of these silly notions that technique doesn't matter and can be dismissed as "mere aesthetics".

I believe that Harry Watt, in his recent letter to the *New Statesman*, has given the fairest comment on the whole business. "It was Grierson's

drive and initiative that obtained the formation of the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit . . . it was the introduction of Cavalcanti's professional skill and incredible film sense that raised the standard and reputation of British documentary."

I sympathise with the ideals of British documentary, and there are occasions when the duty of a friend is to speak bluntly. One of its worst enemies is its own narrow parochialism which occasionally borders on intolerance. It is all too easy for the fervent propagandist to see little good in other causes and no fault in his own. (Hence, perhaps, the curious blindness which leads Wright to describe our omission of *Aero-Engine* or *Transfer of Power* as an omission of the analytic film in general.)

It is perhaps because of this (or perhaps it is merely an accident) that in a six-column review of *Film and Reality* no mention is made of the British Film Institute or the National Film Library which produced the film and whose pioneer work in collecting and preserving early films made its production possible. I mention this, not from personal disappointment, but because it hinges on to this matter of technique. *Film and Reality* was made for the National Film Library's Loan Section whose object is to encourage film appreciation, and provide material for its study. I happen to believe in the future and the value of film appreciation as enthusiastically as Basil Wright believes in documentary.

Those of us in the film world who are idealists look on British documentary as a pretty big thing because it promises so much to our hopes. But when we get away from the charmed air of Soho Square and talk to ordinary film-goers in suburbs and provinces, and see the programmes they see, we are reminded that documentaries are still a mere droplet in the ocean of film production which floods the screens of the world. How is documentary to carry its message in the face of such rivalry?

Surely the only solution lies in an enlightened public opinion. The cinema is the greatest popular art of our time. In the cinema he who does not satisfy millions will quickly be forced to use his talents elsewhere. This throws a heavy burden of responsibility for its future development on the cinema audience itself. If the possibilities of the cinema are to be realised and used to the greatest social good, audiences must become far more knowledgeable and critical. As Hitchcock said somewhere, the director can only go as far as his audience will let him.

Fortunately the task is not a difficult one. People, especially young people, are astonishingly eager to learn. The film industry itself, with its curious notion that knowledge will destroy the cinema's illusion, and with its ersatz diet of fairy tales for film fans, is much to blame for the fact that they have not already learnt far more.

We believe that in tackling the problem of film appreciation we are tackling one of the major problems of our time, namely the relation of cinema to society. An audience critically alive will no longer be at the mercy of every smart Alick who can turn out a nicely-lit picture and a well-recorded track. And in particular, (although our concern, of course, is with the whole of the cinema, and not merely with one part of it), such an audience will readily respond to the best the documentary movement can give it; and by that I mean technically the best. The result will not only be a demand for good documentaries, but also their showing will achieve, as it already does

for the intelligent film-goer, an importance out of all relation to their footage.

I believe, in short, that the roads pursued by British documentary and by the National Film Library in its film appreciation work (and, one might add, by the A.C.T. which has become a most valuable forum where technicians themselves can exchange ideas and experience) can and should lie in the same direction. Discriminating audiences will demand good films; good films will help to train discriminating audiences. It is in this faith that we made *Film and Reality*. It is in this faith that I earnestly hope that British documentary, before it is too late, will reverse its basic thesis to: "We are film-makers first and propagandists second." Otherwise I can see little hope for the success of their propaganda.

Yours faithfully,

ERNEST H. LINDGREN,
Curator, National Film Library,
British Film Institute.

WRIGHT'S REPLY

SIR,

There are one or two points in Lindgren's letter which call for a reply.

Firstly, there is the alleged "contempt for technique" which Lindgren claims has permeated all the critical writing of the British school in recent years. How Lindgren arrived at this conclusion is a mystery to me, though it may partly be due to the confusion between "technique" and "aesthetics" which is such a marked feature of his letter.

I repeat unrepentantly the phrase "mere aesthetics". Nothing, to my mind, could be worse than an approach to any art form which is self-consciously concerned merely with aesthetic considerations. Such an approach is not the job of the critic; still less so is it the job of the documentary film maker.

The following points are not personal opinion, but fact:—

1. "We are propagandists first and film makers second" has been the basis of the documentary movement since its inception in 1929. Curiously enough this phrase does not mean that we are uninterested in film making.
2. Documentary, under the direct leadership of John Grierson, has, despite this "deleterious" motto, done more experiment with the film form than any other group in this country.
3. These experiments arose from a desire to use the film as a sociological medium, and the aesthetics of documentary arose from such a desire. Technically we needed to explore and exploit all the possibilities of the film. Creatively we needed to put our message across as a living entity to our audiences. Hence another "unfortunate" slogan—"The creative interpretation of reality".

These points I should have thought Lindgren, with his very wide and acute knowledge of the whole world of film, would have been the first to understand. But instead he tries to find contradictions in two statements in my article.

The first, which incidentally he misquotes, is as follows: "The various early experiments in sound were important not merely from the aesthetic point of view, but because they were designed to strengthen and clarify (not "classify" as Lindgren quotes me) the social angle." In other words we

weren't trying merely to make beautiful noises, we were trying to say something important.

The second statement, which is alleged to contradict the first, is that documentary tended "to sacrifice purely aesthetic considerations to the need for pungent comment and the imaginative presentation of facts and problems". This has been true of a number of very important documentaries. It is true of *Housing Problems*, *The Nutrition Film* and *Children at School*, for instance. Yet curiously enough, *Housing Problems* especially in its final sequence, has to me at least had a considerable "aesthetic" impact on all of the many occasions on which I have seen it. And what about that super-example of the unaesthetic subject, *Target for Tonight*?

I think Lindgren has muddled his argument by identifying "technique" with "aesthetics". The words are not interchangeable.

That Lindgren agrees on the point that to-day "The revolutionary technique is the only technique" naturally delights me, but when in the same breath he accuses us of "silly notions that technique doesn't matter" I am completely bewildered. No one in documentary has ever to my knowledge said or written anything of the sort. Such an idea is certainly not to be found in my article. As I have already pointed out, constant experiments in technique have always been, and will continue to be, one of the most marked features of documentary film making.

Now we come to the second major point to which a reply is necessary. I was indeed astonished to find that Lindgren was in agreement with an extraordinary letter which appeared recently in the *New Statesman*.

Grierson, like all great men, is well able to ignore attacks made on him from whatever

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(continued from previous page)

motives. But in the interests of accuracy, and also because I am sure that I am expressing the feelings of documentary workers as a whole, I must point out that Grierson has always been and still is a remarkable technician, a magnificent teacher, and, in short, a great producer. To suggest that his "drive and initiative . . . obtained the formation of the E.M.B. Film Unit", but that his influence was then superseded by that of Cavalcanti (who joined us in 1934, five years after the E.M.B. Unit had been formed), is a statement which must have astonished Cavalcanti as much as it astonishes anyone who knows anything of the British documentary movement.

I owe far too much to Cavalcanti to give the impression that I wish to belittle in any way the enormous contribution he made to documentary during the period in which he was working with us. Indeed, that Grierson invited him to join us is an excellent example of Grierson's deep understanding of the needs of documentary as regards the development of treatment and technique under an experienced and exceptionally talented teacher.

Grierson is not merely the founder of the documentary movement. Since its inception it has been his own understanding of film technique, his encouragement of experimentation and (to meet Lindgren on his own ground) his uncanny grasp and knowledge of aesthetics as regards art in general and film art in particular, which have been the driving force and inspiration of the progress of documentary.

These qualities, out of deference to Lindgren, I have put first, but I must now add Grierson's political grasp and foresight, his incredible energy and organisational drive, and, above all, his unswerving loyalty not merely to the idea of documentary but also to all those working with him.

I am sorry to have to recite this factual ABC, which will be so familiar to all unbiased readers of D.N.L. who know anything about the Documentary Movement, but when a man of Lindgren's standing closes his eyes to simple facts, it is necessary to try and open them again. I am doubly sorry for the attack on Grierson since it is unfair to Cavalcanti, who worked so well and so fruitfully with us all under Grierson's leadership, and whose latest film, *The Foreman Went to France*, is so distinguished by its realist technique, its excellent propaganda message, and its cinematic integrity.

I am in entire agreement with Lindgren's feelings as regards film appreciation, and, in common I am sure with all documentary workers, will welcome all and any efforts by him and his colleagues at the Film Institute to tackle "the relation of cinema to society".

I am sure, however, he will forgive us if we don't take his advice about aesthetics.

We are to-day all of us engaged in the urgencies of war. Much of our work must perforce be devoted to short-term messages; but the various productions by documentary people in all sorts of units are sufficient evidence that documentary's basic purposes still hold good and hold firm.

I am not interested in parochial squabbles any more than Grierson is; nor do I think any good purpose can be served by discussing this matter further, now that the facts of the case have been restated.

Yours, etc.,

BASIL WRIGHT

FILM OF THE MONTH

THE FOREMAN WENT TO FRANCE

IT WAS a very hot Sunday afternoon and you would have thought that after the long winter people would have wanted to get out in the sun and warm air and see the Spring. As we walked up Piccadilly and the Circus came in sight, we could see the queue. "Damn all these people going into stuffy cinemas when they should be out in the healthy fresh air".

Inside it was nearly full and warming up. Half-past three, twenty to four, and the stalls started clapping. Looking round, you see old Anstey sitting in the row behind—he seems to be nodding off. He suddenly looks up and sees you. I suppose all the boys are here waiting to see what Cavalcanti's film's going to be like. More clapping, and on comes the five minuter, *The Owner Goes Aloft*. Not one of the best, but everyone is pleased to see something, and it goes down well. Then *Hayfoot*, which also goes down very well. James Gleason is good and old Joe Sawyer (who was in the *Informer*) is good too. Then the newsreel—Universal and Mr. Jefferys who I don't like. Then the lights come up.

The curtains open and blue and red lights are thrown on the screen and they run the Rat trailer which is very good, but you can't really see it for the coloured lights. Its really hot and stuffy by now. All the air conditioning schemes seem to have gone wrong since the war started. Maybe it was the bombs. And they are standing down the side gangways. Then on comes *The Foreman Went to France*. Plain black and white titles. Its a wonder the English don't have trade marks like the Americans. Direction Charles Frend—Associate Producer Cavalcanti—just straight Cavalcanti—Script Angus Macphail and Leslie Arliss—couldn't get the third name. Sound, Len Page—he recorded *Housing Problems*. Photography, Wilkie Cooper, and we're off. That's old Bill Blewitt as one of the fire watchers.

After a reminiscing first sequence, we are back into 1940 and the film itself. All the opening sequences of Clifford Evans trying to break down the stupidity of the factory management and civil service red tape go down very well. The audience seem to know that story by heart. I don't like Clifford Evans very much, he's too sincerely sincere. All the French people are extremely well cast though. I don't like Robert Morley very much either—he's too clever—but he is well directed and toned down. He is the villain so you can dislike him anyway. The first

glimpse of Tommy Trinder and Gordon Jackson is very pleasant. It's nice to see someone being honest.

The film really comes alive. (The attitude towards looting is typical of the whole film.) It is all very honest and very true—and the film is extremely good as propaganda, instruction, and especially morale. No points are laboured, nothing is distorted to make a propaganda point—which is such a common failing with both shorts and features. There is an example at the end of the film when they are trying to persuade a French fishing captain to take the machinery on his already overcrowded boat. The skipper says he doesn't know whether he can manage the machinery. The foreman, having heard that the French are fond of money, pulls out all his money, gives it to the skipper and says, "There'll be more when we get to England"—and the Frenchman just looks at him and says, "I don't want your money". A sequence like this clears anti-French feeling, and, more importantly, it does it honestly. It doesn't just say that there is nothing wrong with the French. It admits that maybe the French are fond of a little money, but it says at the same time that there are plenty of things the French are more interested in than money. It is rather an obscure point, but it is a very important one. In so many films, and often because of the official attitude, everything is either pure white or pure black; and it becomes just silly as far as convincing anyone is concerned.

Once the film has started, it just gets better and better. The various fifth columnists, the beautiful sequences of French children—the audience are just lapping it up. This is the kind of stuff that English audiences have been waiting for for many a year. Tommy Trinder's and Gordon Jackson's dialogue is terrific. Someone using real English dialogue well. I bet it wasn't written by a studio writer—maybe that's unfair, but we have never heard anything as good before. Of course, a lot of credit is due to the directing and acting that puts the lines over—but you've got to have something to work from.

What more is there to be said? The film is all good from the beginning to the end—it deals honestly and respectfully with people—it puts the dirty dogs in their places. All you can do is to congratulate Cavalcanti, the actors and the technicians, and Michael Balcon, and hope that they will make more films as good as this one.

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WOMEN AND PROPAGANDA

By EDITH MANVELL

WHEN war was declared women expected to be called up within a few weeks to take an active part in the war effort. While they were waiting for the machinery of organising the conscription of woman power to be set in motion, many women who felt they could spare several hours a week from their home duties, did voluntary war work, but they regarded this as only a temporary measure. Time passed, the war seemed at a standstill, and the first desire to serve the country for the defence of our homes relapsed into passivity.

Eventually the call came—a million volunteers were needed. At last the moment had come for action. It was not quite what was expected, women were not conscripted, they were merely asked to volunteer. No one quite knew what to do. They waited for orders. Nothing seemed to happen, they just had to go on waiting. What irritated people was that after being asked by the Government to volunteer for war work, they were so often told there was nothing they could do. A woman who offered to do part-time work was told, when she arrived at the factory, that there wasn't a job for her, but if she liked she could sweep the place up a bit. Is it a wonder that they feel humiliated and exclaim angrily, "If they want me, they must come and fetch me next time." Apathy breeds apathy and so the second great opportunity of gaining the willing co-operation of women was lost.

Once more the Government had put the cart before the horse—in fact there probably was no horse. The propaganda was there, but there was no clear national policy, no driving power to action, no organisation to give it effect.

Those women who were conscious of the urgency of total warfare were prepared for strict control and a temporary suspension of personal liberties if it meant greater efficiency. But the Government decided to let us down gently; they tried through their propaganda to coax us into making sacrifices voluntarily, with the obvious result that only conscientious people took any notice. The methods of appealing to our social sense were sometimes strangely perverted. For instance, in our daily papers there was the photograph of a cunning little boy telling his father to put his money into Savings Certificates in order to avoid paying income tax!

Propaganda if it is to be effective must be honest and not resort to tricks or side-tracking from vital issues: any insincerity, patronising or cajoling only provokes resentment or indifference. Women don't expect to be treated like spoiled children. Activity—getting something done—is the only approach which will produce effective results. Often it is woman's practical common sense which cuts through many a tangle of red tape, and male officials have been disconcerted at a woman's complete lack of respect for rules and regulations if they are obsolete or prevent effective action. There are no written laws in the home; each problem is handled as it arises and as circumstances alter a case; so each problem receives the appropriate treatment. That does not mean that every home is well run or free from muddles: however dull the routine may be, there are times when every woman has to use initiative. If this is guided by a shrewd

sense of humour it is certain that all the little trials and troubles in the home will be smoothed away.

It is precisely this element in home life which should be taken into account when directing a policy of propaganda for women—something practical and good humoured. If we consider some of the films which have been made about women or for women we can see the good and bad qualities of our propaganda in practice.

Fortunately the mediocre films are quickly forgotten. The better documentary films often leave a lasting impression, not in details but of the spirit which is the essence of the film. For instance *Land Girl*, which has recently been released, is not specifically intended as a recruiting film to persuade girls to join the land army—it has a more human approach, and what impresses many people is the fact that here is a girl who has given up a town job, who undertakes some of the most arduous work a woman can do, who is actuated not by high falutin patriotic principles but by a real love for the job in hand and a realisation of the need for it to be done: and yet she finds herself up against difficulties, not created by the enemy, but by the prejudices of the people for whom she works. A weaker woman would have packed up and gone home, but here is a girl with grit and faith enough to master the difficulties and by sheer ability overcome the opposition which threatened to make her life hard and wretched. The girl is real to the audience, and she wins admiration and respect for those qualities which are essential whatever the job may be. The woman engineer, the woman in the Forces, the woman who works on transport may be up against this kind of prejudice—it may be the sceptical attitude of men, or the scornful pity of women who say, "You look just awful, my dear, in that ghastly uniform."

The best propaganda films are those which show men and women doing a really fine job and in which the individual triumphs over difficulties and dangers—the sort of films which show women at their best—not thereby implying that all women are angels, but proving by a concrete and genuine example that they can be very efficient, practical and hardworking people if they appreciate the need for the job they are asked to do. Propaganda by example is therefore the most effective.

One of the difficulties which confronts those responsible for propaganda films is to make a universal appeal and avoid the temptation to present a theme from a limited class angle. Most of the films on women up to the present have a middle-class flavour. *W.R.N.S.* is just such a film; it represents the women in this service as rather self-consciously refined young ladies brought up in the best traditions; to a working-class girl certain parts of this film might appear just "silly", and as far as she is concerned, the recruiting value of the film is lost. She knows perfectly well that when she is called up she will have a much tougher job to do, and parading smartly in uniform doesn't seem to have much to do with fighting the enemy.

It might be interesting to contrast two films about women; the one *W.V.S.* and the other made in Russia, *100,000 Women*. As films they

are very simply made, using a newsreel technique—a panorama of activity. In the Russian film the women are for the most part tough, working-class types. Though some of the work they do, as for example the digging of tank traps, requires great physical endurance, it is pointed out in the commentary that most of the work they do requires skill and intelligence rather than strength.

Several times during the film we are made aware of their indomitable courage, as when the parachute nurse jumps from a 'plane. The man who is going into the army entrusts the gathering of the harvest to his wife: he is seen teaching her to drive a tractor. She will do the job even though the German army may invade and destroy her farm. Those parts of the film which deal with military and defence services are not represented as parades in uniform but show us the grim determination on the women's faces and the arduous nature of their work. There is nothing smart about the physical appearance of these Russian women; they reserve that quality for efficiency in their job.

Nevertheless there is little in this film which could not be seen happening everywhere in Britain. The working-class women in this country are just as efficient and tough, but they are handicapped by two things—on the one hand there are the prejudices of the men who have never employed woman labour, and the men who are unwilling to teach them their own skilled work; and on the other there is the failure of the Government to supply that kind of propaganda which makes people believe in the urgency of their job. People are not yet quite sure whether they are working for a victory that will take us back to 1939, or whether victory will bring an opportunity for righting the social and economic evils of the past. This is the problem that makes so much of our propaganda ineffectual.

The film *W.V.S.* is an example of the varied nature of the work done voluntarily by women referred to as "Maids of all work in green uniforms". Much of the work is uninspiring but necessary to the war effort, such as collecting salvage, and sorting clothes. The more interesting moments in the film are those which show us the women supplying food to demolition workers and dockers and waiting with ambulances and cars to drive shipwrecked casualties to hospital. And yet this film fails to give anything but the most superficial idea of the part women are taking in the war effort. It is not enough to be shown well-meaning, kindly and industrious women; we want to feel something of the faith which inspires them and the dynamic will to put every ounce of effort into freeing this country from the threat of defeat and slavery. It is once more the official propaganda which is at fault, because it is ineffectual and avoids the really vital issues. When we see the women porters at railway stations, women working on the lines, women as builders' labourers, or working machines which men were quite sure they couldn't manage, we know that the material for films is there, but until those responsible for commissioning such films make up their minds to provide something less refined than we have had up to the present, the real hard work done by women in this country will pass unnoticed.

WE HAVE OUR TROUBLES TOO!

By MARY LOSEY, noted U.S. Documentary Expert.

AT FIRST glance an invitation to write about U.S. wartime documentary propaganda has the ring of opportunity. But then the eye stops, frozen on a word—"policy". Whose policy? Which policy?

Not long ago we learned from our president that Washington has its Cliveden set, which has a policy. The exponents of defence have a policy. So have exponents of offence. There is a business as usual policy. A business better than usual policy and an all-out policy. There is the timid policy that the public is to be informed "in terms of" facts. How it smacks of all the mimeographed reports stacked end on end, "dictated but not read". There's the policy of sending shorts of South America on subjects that will offend nobody. And there's a policy that decides that some producers of prophetic documentary films are incompetent because they made films attacking fascism before it was nice to be anti-fascist.

Occasionally, too, there is the catch-me-if-you-can policy of a producer who gets loose and makes a picture saying that South American young people are much like North American young people and therefore have a common ground for fighting the Axis. Or others wander off and make a film about nursery camps because they think they are important, especially since we have no plans for the care of young children in this war.

In Washington they have a dozen different policies ranging from the sponsors of *The Land* (not yet released), to the Office of Emergency Management which believes in keeping us informed on the battle of production. The O.E.M. is telling us that we can and are making the necessary instruments of war. And this we are glad to know. The only catch is that after you've said that we can make tanks and we can make bombers, and we have a lot of electric power, then you can go on to say that we also make cannon and ships, but there is an end to it eventually and you come smack up against a rather forgotten commodity—people. One brush of the O.E.M. with this ticklish subject is an unforgettable item called *Women in Defence*. First you get a girl in coveralls pirouetting à la Adelaide Hawley while a commentator tells you that women are going to work in this war, and they are going to dress to fit, and becoming too. Before you quite get your bearings you realise to your horror that Katharine Hepburn, whom you really like quite a lot when she stays on her own side of the railroad tracks, is telling you how our women are doing their bit in industry. As I remember it the pictures here are a repetitious montage of women doing things that it is supposed to be remarkable for women to be doing. You might as well have had the Duchess of Windsor teaching British film audiences the Lambeth Walk.

There are some bright spots which lamentably have nothing whatsoever to do with the U.S. documentary policy. They have to do with the National Film Board of Canada and some of the productions that have reached America from England via the Ministry of Information. Grierson's policy of illuminating the Canadian war effort by relating it to the rest of the world is perhaps not ideally suited to duplication here

since the citizens of these States, like the citizens of Britain, still have the habit of thinking that the rest of the world is related to them. All the same we will get more light from seeing the strategy series from Canada and more realisation of the fact that we are fighting a global war than from any of our own productions. The fact that from henceforth American audiences will have the monthly opportunity to see *The World in Action* is the best news of the moment.

Perhaps it is not beyond the realm of possibility that Hollywood will have taken a lesson from the audiences flocking to *Target for Tonight*. The time is past when Selective Service was just a huge joke on a bunch of guys who used to make fifty bucks a week and now have to work their heads off for twenty-one dollars a month and a sergeant who talks and acts like a Brooklyn Dodger fan. We were pretty pompous a year ago in our judgment of the British product that came our way. "London can take it", we said. "Yeah, but can she dish it out?" I shudder to think what our snooky spectacles of the latest sweater girl singing blues in the officers' mess make of our war effort.

This is not to disparage some notable shorts such as *Eyes of the Navy*, *The New Spirit*, with Donald Duck to tell you that all you gotta do is do it, or the easy-to-take friendly advice of a film like *Safeguarding Military Secrets*. But with such notable exceptions and some individual con-

tributions such as those on *Our Russian Front*, you can chalk up Hollywood's contribution to date as a dead loss.

"Some day," says Bob Flaherty, who has discovered quite a bit of America himself these past few years. "Some day we will wake up and discover that it takes more than machines to win this war: it also takes people."

When that day comes it will show in our films. Then our films will recognise that this is no football game but a fight; that we want light,—not cheerleaders. Then films will begin to shed light wherever they can. They may begin with simple geography but however they begin they will teach, relate and lead.

No one can sit down at his typewriter and outline to-day the films that must be made this year or even this month. But that is not a question for policy but for plan. Plan will change from week to week. Policy must be a clear and constant directive. The American people are free men and women who wish to fight to make their freedom lasting and real. Our policy will be to make films which will help them to understand the job before them and to fortify the courage and will to do it.

But that would be propaganda—and when you say that,—smile—no,—giggle.

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FILM SOCIETY NEWS

The Film Society of Ayrshire reports that the outlook at the beginning of the season was anything but favourable as the theatre in Prestwick was no longer available. Since there was not another suitable theatre in the town, the Council decided to tackle the problem of the eighth season by trying for a theatre in Ayr, four miles distant. The management of the Ritz Cinema, Ayr, appreciated the application for the use of the theatre and the local magistrates gave their approval of our performances. From the beginning the Society has been an unqualified success in Ayr. In Kilmarnock, too, where the same programme is shown in the afternoon, the attendances have been regular, with the result that the Society is approaching the end of its most successful season, having upward of 1,400 members between the two theatres. Perhaps the most gratifying feature to the Council is that well over 2,000 members of the Allied Forces have already availed themselves of Guest Membership. The season opened with Charles Boyer in *Le Bonheur*, on the same programme was *La Jolie de Vivre*, which was well received. Among other films shown during the season were *Down Went McGinty*, *The Life of Emile Zola*, *Hoppin and Gross' Fox Hunt*, *Les Disparus de St. Agil*, *The Last Night*, Kellino's *I Met a Murderer*, the Swedish short *Early One Morning*, the Russian documentary *Conquerors of the North*, *Carnet de Bal*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Les Rois du Sport* and *Shors*. The season will conclude with two special programmes, the first on *Hollywood* and the last meeting on the subject of *Crackers*. The feature will be the Marx Brothers' *Night at the Opera*.

The Edinburgh Film Guild ended a remarkably successful season with a special Russian programme with *Shors* as the feature, supported by shorts, including *Russian Salad*. The M.O.I. five-minuter *Land Girl* and Massingham's *And So to Work* were also shown. *Claudine* was shown on February 22nd with some interesting shorts, and on March 11th there was a performance of prize-winning amateur films. Membership has increased steadily since the outbreak of war and the pre-war total has almost been reached. The annual meeting will be held in June.

The Manchester and District Film Institute Society and Manchester and Salford Film Society report that in association with the British Council, the Societies presented *Film and Reality* at the Rivoli Cinema on March 22nd. *Machines and Men* and *Guests of Honour* were also shown. Professor R. A. C. Oliver, Head of the Manchester University Department of Education, welcomed Mr. Alberto Cavalcanti as the guest speaker. During the discussion, which lasted an hour, the Secretary raised the question of content and political and social values in cinema, and recalled Cavalcanti's earlier criticism in *WORLD FILM NEWS* of the *Life of Emile Zola* on these grounds while admitting the film's considerable qualities of realism. In reply, Cavalcanti stressed that in making *Film and Reality*, it had been found convenient to limit the theme more to changes in technique in the realist film. Another member sought an explanation for the lack of realism in the sound track (faked news-reel sound, etc.), and some of the technical diffi-

culties of achieving the same degree of realism as in the visuals at the present stage of sound recording were indicated. This report from the *Manchester Guardian* summarises the remaining part of the discussion: "Answering questions afterwards, Mr. Cavalcanti forecast much greater demand for realist films in the commercial cinema after the war. He criticised the Ministry of Information for making what he called a false distinction between theatrical and non-theatrical films, and for trying to combine the propagandist appeal of a short-recruiting film with the qualities of documentary realism."

The Pontypool Educational Settlement Film Society reports: Although the Settlement opened for its present session last autumn, it was not until January of this year that we were able to start the season's series of film shows. So far we have shown the following films: *The End of St. Petersburg*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *The Turn of the Tide* and *Rembrandt*. For our future programmes we have booked: *Spanish Earth*, *And So to Work*, *Kameradschaft*, *Potemkin*, *Song of Ceylon* and *The Plow that Broke the Plains*.

The Dundee and St. Andrews Film Society presented the French film *Serenade*, directed by Jean Boyer, on Sunday, February 22nd. Two shorts, *Transfer of Power* and *Aircrow* were also shown.

Scottish Churches Film Guild (Glasgow Branch) showed *Try What Love Will Do* at their March meeting. It was considered quite suitable for religious teaching though the opinion was that it was insufficient just to shake hands after the workman had been dismissed and remained unemployed without any compensation being given.

The Belfast Film Institute Society reports:— With the showing of *La Femme du Boulanger* already reported in D.N.L., the season of seven shows originally planned came to an end. But as interest in the Society's work seemed to be well maintained it has been decided to arrange one further show for May 9th. For this the feature film booked is *Shors*, which would provide interesting comparison with *Chapayev*, which was shown in autumn. It is hoped that we shall be able to secure some representative recent Soviet shorts to complete the programme. Publication of the Society's monthly Film Review is being continued until June and the season will end with the Annual General Meeting in late May. At this meeting it has been our custom to show some sub-standard film of historic interest but so far no definite arrangements have been made for this year's meeting (but it would be unfortunate if the practice had to be broken), for although the Society have screened many films there has been nothing in the way of discussion and lecture meetings in this past winter.

The Workers' Film Association Ltd. is not allowing the war to interfere with its work of popularising the film as a medium of education and propaganda. Proposals are under consideration for the production of a film on the Cavalcade of Labour. This film will show how the workers through struggle and comradeship have attained a position of partnership in the State at the most critical period of our history.

A Film Summer School is being arranged at Holywell Manor, St. Hugh's College, Oxford, during the period 18th to 24th July. The speakers so far secured are Mr. George Ridley, M.P., Mr. George Pearson "Feature Films and Social Problems", Mr. Oliver Bell, "How the Film has become one of our most important ambassadors"; Mr. Pat Mannonck, film critic of the *Daily Herald*, "The films I review"; Mr. Ritchie Calder, "How the film can be used for scientific education"; Mr. Anthony Asquith, "I turn Film Critic"; Mr. Ivor Montagu, "Soviet Films", and finally Joseph Reeves, "Recent successes of the Workers' Film Association." Films will be screened during the week on democracy, Soviet Union, etc.

As accommodation will be limited, application should be made to Mr. J. Reeves, Workers' Film Association Ltd., Transport House, Smith Square, S.W.1, as soon as possible.

SCIENTIFIC FILM SOCIETIES

With the meeting on March 18th, the Glasgow Society completed its ordinary meetings for the present season. Two extra meetings have still to be held, the first of these taking the form of a joint matinee with the Glasgow Branch of the Scottish Educational Film Association, in the Cosmo Cinema. The programme will consist of films suitable for the higher forms of secondary schools, and should do much to arouse the interest of these students in the activities of the Society.

The second extra meeting, to be held in May, will consist of a lecture, with illustrations, on "Orthochromatics", and will be a joint meeting with the Photographical Society of the Royal Technical College.

During the past season, the members have seen at the six ordinary meetings of the Society, a total of 49 films, of which nine were semi-scientific documentary, five were cartoons, and the remaining 35 scientific films were divided into groups as follows:—

Natural History	4
Zoology	6
Embryology	1
Botany	4
Hygiene and Public Health	3
Chemistry	3
Engineering	4
Physics	4
Astronomy	2
Industrial Chemistry and Metallurgy	4

The Society has not, as yet, built a programme round a single subject as the members seem to prefer one constructed on the basis of one film in each of the following classes: Zoological, Natural History, Botanical, Engineering, and Chemical or Physical.

With regard to the zoological films, the policy has been to start with the lower forms of life and proceed through a complete series. An innovation this season was the inclusion of a "March of Time" film in each programme and this was so successful that it will be continued until the supply is exhausted.

NEWS & SPECIALISED THEATRE ASSOCIATION SHORT FILM BOOKINGS FOR APRIL/MAY 1942

	Week commencing		Week commencing		Week commencing
Aeronautics		November Celebrations.		Stranger than Fiction 84	
The Tatler Theatre, Manchester	May 3rd	The Tatler Theatre, Birmingham	April 26th	The News Theatre, Nottingham	May 10th
The News Theatre, Leeds	4th	Old New Orleans		Stranger than Fiction No. 93	
Army Champions		The News Theatre, Bristol	April 19th	The News Theatre, Aberdeen	April 26th
The News Theatre, Nottingham	May 10th	The Premier News Theatre, Bournemouth	May 3rd	Stone	
At the Stroke of 12		The News Theatre, Leeds	May 11th	The Tatler News Theatre, Newcastle-	
The News Theatre, Bristol	April 19th	The Tatler Theatre, Manchester	17th	on-Tyne	April 19th
The News Theatre, Manchester	19th	Old New Mexico		Strong Point 42	
Australia Marches with Britain		The Tatler Theatre, Manchester	April 26th	The Tatler News Theatre, Birmingham	April 19th
Premier News Theatre, Bournemouth	April 26th	On the Spot		Symphony in Snow	
Besieged Odessa		The News Theatre, Leeds	April 20th	Eros Theatre, W.1	April 30th
The News Theatre, Nottingham	May 3rd	The Tatler Theatre, Birmingham	26th	The News Theatre, Manchester	May 3rd
Casino Caddy		On Ice		The Carpenters	
The Tatler Theatre, Manchester	April 26th	The Tatler News Theatre, Liverpool	April 26th	The Tatler Theatre, Chester	April 20th
Cosmo Cinema, Glasgow	27th	Pampas Paddocks		The Golden Touch	
Caribbean Sentinel		The Tatler Theatre, Manchester	May 17th	Cosmo Cinema, Glasgow	May 4th
The News Theatre, Nottingham	May 10th	Plane Sailing		The Man I Cured	
Ceramics		The News Theatre, Birmingham	April 19th	The Tatler Theatre, Manchester	April 19th
The Tatler News Theatre, Newcastle-		Please Answer		The Old South	
on-Tyne	April 26th	The News Theatre, Nottingham	May 3rd	Cosmo Cinema, Glasgow	May 11th
Child Psychology		The Tatler Theatre, Chester	11th	The Poles Weigh Anchor	
The Tatler Theatre, Manchester	May 3rd	Polar Trappers		The News Theatre, Aberdeen	May 3rd
Common Heritage		Eros Theatre, W.1	April 19th	The Tatler Theatre, Manchester	May 10th
The Tatler News Theatre, Newcastle-		Porkey's Poor Fish		The News Theatre, Leeds	May 11th
on-Tyne	May 10th	Tatler News Theatre, Newcastle-		The Robber Kitten	
Cookie Carnival		on-Tyne	May 3rd	The Tatler News Theatre, Newcastle-	
The Tatler News Theatre, Newcastle-		Recruiting Daze	April 20th	on-Tyne	April 26th
on-Tyne	April 19th	The News Theatre, Leeds		The Whalers	
Dog Obedient		Rolling Rhythm	April 27th	Eros Theatre, W.1	April 23rd
The Tatler Theatre, Birmingham	April 19th	Russian Salad		This Place Australia	
The News Theatre, Leeds	May 4th	The Tatler Theatre, Chester	May 4th	The Tatler Theatre, Chester	April 20th
Donald's Nephews		Sacred Ganges		Trail of the Buccaneers	
Eros Theatre, W.1	April 26th	Eros Theatre, W.1	April 30th	The News Theatre, Manchester	April 19th
Early to Bed		San Francisco—Metropolis of the West		The News Theatre, Birmingham	19th
Cosmo Cinema, Glasgow	April 20th	The News Theatre, Bristol	April 26th	The Tatler News Theatre, Newcastle-	
Fifty Below Zero		Scrub Me Mama with a Boogie Beat	May 11th	on-Tyne	May 3rd
The News Theatre, Leeds	April 20th	The News Theatre, Leeds		Training Police Horses	
Four Legged Soldiers		Shampoo Spring	May 11th	The News Theatre, Bristol	May 10th
The Tatler Theatre, Manchester	April 26th	Tatler News Theatre, Newcastle-		Three Little Pigs	
The Tatler News Theatre, Newcastle-		on-Tyne	April 26th	Cosmo Cinema, Glasgow	May 11th
on-Tyne	May 3rd	She was an Acrobat's Daughter		Three Little Wolves	
Free France		The Tatler News Theatre, Newcastle-	April 26th	Tatler News Theatre, Newcastle-	
Waterloo Station News Theatre, S.E.1	April 23rd	on-Tyne	May 10th	on-Tyne	April 19th
Gabby Goes Fishing		Ship Shape	May 10th	Tyneside	
The News Theatre, Leeds	May 4th	The News Theatre, Aberdeen	May 10th	The News Theatre, Aberdeen	April 26th
The Tatler Theatre, Manchester	10th	Sign of Victory		The Tatler News Theatre, Liverpool	April 26th
Gateway to the West		The News Theatre, Aberdeen	April 26th	The Tatler News Theatre, Newcastle-	
The News Theatre, Aberdeen	May 3rd	Sitka and Juneau		on-Tyne	May 3rd
George Washington—Country Gentleman		The Tatler Theatre, Chester	April 27th	Vitamin Hay	
The Tatler News Theatre, Newcastle-		Skyline Serenade	May 3rd	The Tatler Theatre, Manchester	April 26th
on-Tyne	April 19th	The News Theatre, Manchester		The News Theatre, Leeds	April 27th
Glorious Vamp		So you won't Squawk	May 3rd	The News Theatre, Birmingham	May 3rd
The News Theatre, Aberdeen	May 3rd	The Tatler Theatre, Chester	May 3rd	Western Isles	
Going Places with Graham McHames No. 93		Song of the Clyde	April 27th	The News Theatre, Manchester	May 10th
The News Theatre, Aberdeen	April 19th	The World's News Theatre, W.1	April 30th	What's Lacrosse?	
Going Places		Waterloo Station News Theatre, S.E.1	30th	The Tatler Theatre, Manchester	May 10th
The News Theatre, Nottingham	May 3rd	The News Theatre, Aberdeen	May 10th	The News Theatre, Birmingham	10th
Going Places 89		Spring Frolics	April 19th	The News Theatre, Leeds	11th
The News Theatre, Nottingham	May 3rd	Stranger than Fiction 89		Willie and the Mouse	
Hedda Hoppers Hollywood		The News Theatre, Nottingham	April 26th	The Tatler Theatre, Chester	May 4th
The News Theatre, Birmingham	April 26th			World Garden	
The Tatler Theatre, Manchester	May 17th			Premier News Theatre, Bournemouth	April 26th
I'll Never Hell Again				Cosmo Cinema, Glasgow	27th
The News Theatre, Leeds	April 27th				
The Tatler Theatre, Chester	27th				
In the Rear of the Enemy					
The Tatler Theatre, Manchester	April 26th				
In the Groove					
The News Theatre, Manchester	May 10th				
Invasion					
The Tatler Theatre, Chester	April 20th				
The News Theatre, Aberdeen	May 10th				
Journey in Tunisia					
The News Theatre, Bristol	May 10th				
Letter from Cairo					
The News Theatre, Bristol	April 26th				
The News Theatre, Nottingham	26th				
Lions on the Loose					
The Tatler Theatre, Manchester	May 10th				
Man who changed the World					
The News Theatre, Leeds	April 20th				
March of Time No. 9—America at War					
The News Theatre, Aberdeen	April 19th				
The News Theatre, Nottingham	19th				
March of Time No. 10					
Premier News Theatre, Bournemouth	April 12th				
World's News Theatre, W.1	23rd				
The Tatler Theatre, Birmingham	May 3rd				
Cosmo Cinema, Glasgow	4th				
March of Time No. 11—7th Year					
Eros Theatre, W.1	April 19th				
Waterloo Station News Theatre, S.E.1	19th				
The Tatler Theatre, Manchester	May 3rd				
Premier News Theatre, Bournemouth	3rd				
Merseyside					
The Tatler News Theatre, Liverpool	April 19th				
Mickey's Amateur					
The Tatler News Theatre, Newcastle-	April 26th				
on-Tyne					
Mickey's Trailer					
The World's News Theatre, W.1	April 26th				
More about Nostradamus					
The Tatler Theatre, Chester	April 20th				
Moscow Hits Back					
The Tatler Theatre, Manchester	April 19th				
Moth and the Flame					
The World's News Theatre, W.1	April 19th				

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"OUR FILM"

By RALPH BOND

"OUR FILM" is something unique in British film production, for it is the first entirely voluntary and co-operative film to be made by professional workers in this country.

It started some months ago when, inspired by the epic fight of the Soviet Union, a mass meeting of all employees at Denham Studios passed a resolution of solidarity with the film workers of the Leningrad Studios who were working—and fighting—under fire.

After the meeting it occurred to several people that resolutions were not enough. They must be prepared to do something specific. So the Works Committee (representing all the Denham trade unionists) called another meeting and it was unanimously decided that they—the workers, technicians and artists—would make a film on the theme of Anglo-Soviet solidarity and offer it to the Ministry of Information here as part of their contribution to the national effort.

Three committees were set up—Script, Production and Finance. A certain amount of money was needed to pay for materials and incidentals. By gifts, subscriptions and raffles nearly £600 was raised; all the technicians and artists gave their services voluntarily. The Management gave studio space and equipment. Denham Laboratories promised to process the film free of charge, and Kodak's donated 10,000 feet of stock.

After further discussions at Works' Meetings a good, tight script was prepared and production commenced. Four days of shooting and the film was completed. It runs for fourteen minutes and seems much less. I saw it in cutting-copy stage. Music and effects had still to be added, but there is no doubt that *Our Film* is a first-class job of work.

It opens with a domestic scene in a Russian village near the front line. A family is just sitting down to a meal. There is a sudden noise, the camera pans swiftly to the window. A German soldier fires his automatic rifle at the group round the table, wiping them out.

Quick dissolve to a domestic scene in an English working-class home. Again there is a noise, again the camera pans to the window, but this time it is a friend of the family pantomiming to his mates to come out for a drink.

One of the family is a factory shop steward. The next sequence, shot in the factory, reveals the concern of the workers at the delay in production. Machines are standing idle through lack of materials. The men are disgruntled and angry because the Management will not meet them to discuss the position. The shop steward, a trifle nervous and hot-headed, bursts into the Manager's office and plays hell; finally, he is promised a meeting.

The film cuts back to the U.S.S.R. A giant factory has to be evacuated as the Nazis advance towards it. The machinery is piled on lorries, to be reassembled further east and the factory is blown up by the workers.

Back in the English factory, the workers are electing their delegates for the Joint Production Committee they hope to have formed. The meeting between the managers and the workers takes place. There is deep suspicion on both sides. The argument goes on. Finally, the shop steward and

his mates convince the other side that a joint committee is the only way to solve production problems and step up output. But one of the lads put his foot in it by some indiscreet remark and just as it looks as if the argument will have to start all over again, there is an unexpected interruption. The door opens and in walks a stranger. He is one of the Soviet Trade Union representatives visiting England. Forcefully and movingly he demands that they stop arguing. He describes the critical situation of the war. There is no further quarrelling. The committee is formed and over the face of the Russian as he concludes his appeal there is superimposed a shot of tanks rolling off the conveyor belt ready for action.

That is the story of *Our Film* and little remains to be said except that here is a film that somehow or other should get into every cinema and every factory in the country. It is extremely well made and acted, and although there are no credits, the foremost technicians in the camera, sound, art, editing and other departments of Denham have put their best into it.

Our Film admirably fits the needs of the moment. At a time when greater production and Joint Production Committees to achieve it is the main topic of urgency in industry, this film makes a tremendously important contribution. Its propaganda is direct, forceful and entirely logical.

Congratulations to all concerned at Denham.

FILMS IN U.S.S.R.

Ermiler is working on a film which tells the story of a raid by a Red Army division, led by a young Soviet General, in the German rear. The script is by the celebrated writer, Alexei Tolstoy.

Roshal is making a short film entitled *The Murderer Steps Out*, depicting the career of a German fascist leader and showing how he came to power with the aid of shady German business men and reactionary politicians.

L. Kuleshov, one of the older generation of Soviet film directors, is making a film entitled *Norwegians*, depicting the heroism of Norwegian fishermen who help British airmen and Soviet sailors to destroy a German transport. The scenario is by another well known Soviet novelist, Konstantin Fedin.

Pudovkin is producing an anti-fascist film based on short stories by Bert Brecht, the famous German anti-fascist poet and author.

S. M. Eisenstein, in addition to supervising the production of short propaganda films, is preparing the scenario of an historical film entitled *Ivan the Terrible*, which will emphasise not so much the personal character of this ruler, so often dealt with in films and novels, as his important historical side, his foundation of the Russian State out of disconnected feudal princelings, his cementing of it by victories against the Tartars, and his diplomatic relations with other countries, such as the establishment of the flax trade with England.

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